

Submission in response to Consultation on mineral exploration and mining

Gold Mining in Ireland

On the issue of there being no need for gold mining in Ireland I would say that this is a human activity that has gone on for millenia. That does not of itself mean it is right but to stop gold mining in Ireland while some of its inhabitants and institutions continue to trade gold and purchase gold jewellery and benefit from its use in electronics, where as a metal it is preeminent as a conductor, seems to me somewhat hypocritical. Stopping the mining of gold will not stop humans hoarding and coveting the metal. It is a form of wealth that does not require trust based on an IOU and it is core to our global financial system. To stop mining for gold will only make it more scarce because demand continues to rise relentlessly. A soaring gold price will tip the risk reward- equation to encourage more and more illegal mining to the detriment of the environment in the poorest of countries. A ban on well-regulated and environmentally responsible gold mining in Ireland will only shift the problem to weakly regulated and even corrupt jurisdictions without the resources to police. This is the worst form of NIMBYism in my view. We need to consider the planet and not just our own patch when regulating. Everything is interconnected. Ignoring this exposes us to the law of unintended consequences.

On a general note we need to find a place where we all agree and try to expand that space. We need metals for a low-carbon and sustainable energy future. Recycling will not deliver even near what we need. So we need to mine. We need first to listen, to build trust through respectful partnership and dialogue and most of all we need to build capacity in local communities impacted by mining so they can decide what is best for themselves. The time to engage with the community is at the beginning when the first mapping and soil sample is taken or geophysical survey commences. You are judged not by what you say passionately or the impressive technical reports you write but by what you do. Start with the small things. That is the time when the explorer is exposed to the least cost and when risk of rejection is lowest. Alas mine developers leave it too late to engage with local communities when the cost of project rejection is huge and when promoters become blind with panic. There is no avoidance of risk in this world. Only when we are dead do we stop taking risks.

Governments introduce draft policies but what communities believe and trust less and less are governments. Communities want *autonomy* (not independence) to be included and respected and listened to. To have a say and some control over what happens to their communities. There was talk last evening of examples of “hard wiring” social and community acceptance of projects into deciding whether a project moves forward not just for the benefit of the local community but for the country as a whole. This is coming. Why not be ahead of the curve?

Finally if you win the support of an informed local community it will be a fortress to protect genuinely good progressive projects from the arrows of professional luddite-objectors who are against everything. Without the local community you do not have a project. Do not conflate science and facts with persuasion. The latter only comes through transparency, respect and trust. Once emotion becomes involved facts are of little use. Just look at American politics.

With genuine respect for all reasonable constructive viewpoints. Keep listening and keep the dialogue going

